



***Special
Olympics***

**The Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools Program:
Year 10 State Report
2017-2018
*Special Olympics New Jersey***

**Center for Social Development and Education
University of Massachusetts Boston**



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INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston conducts an evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program, providing data to Special Olympics and the U. S. Department of Education. The following report synthesizes data gathered from surveys administered to school staff (“liaisons”) in Unified Champion Schools across the 48 State Special Olympics Programs that participated in the Unified Champion Schools program in Year 10 (the 2017-2018 school year). The purpose of this report is twofold: first, to provide data that give insight to the challenges and successes that liaisons face while implementing the Unified Champion Schools program; and second, to provide each State Program with data that can be used to assess its own Unified Champion Schools programming within the national context. To that end, this report includes information about school demographics, program implementation, student involvement, community support, program impact, and more. The data in this report can be used in a variety of ways by Special Olympics New Jersey; for example, Special Olympics State Programs have used these data for the purpose of securing funding, school outreach, program tracking, program improvement, and public relations/marketing.

Similar to past State Reports, the Year 10 State Report includes textual descriptions, data tables, graphs, and input directly from liaisons. Additionally, appendices attached to the end of the report provide Unified Champion Schools program definitions and rates of survey completion from liaisons. The Year 10 State Report includes new information about student recruitment and opportunities for social and emotional learning. Below are descriptions of the types of information included in this report and guidelines for interpretation.

Data Tables Survey responses from liaisons in New Jersey will be presented alongside national data and labeled in tables throughout this report. You can compare national data with your State Program’s data by looking at these two columns or rows. In each instance, it is left to the State Program to decide how to use these comparisons to inform their Program’s goals and operations. For example:

Table ##. Percentage of schools implementing each Unified Sports activity

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Example State</i>	<i>National</i>
Unified Sports team	64%	82%
Unified PE	57%	70%
Young Athletes	44%	43%
Unified/Special Olympics Fitness	9%	20%

In this instance, Example State implemented most of the Unified Sports activities less often than schools nationally.

Summary Sections After each section of the report, a short summary of the data is given. Summaries include suggestions that are applicable to State Programs across the country and suggestions that are specifically tailored to your State Program based on the data from your state. We hope that this report serves as a useful resource in developing, strengthening, and growing your Unified Champion Schools program in the future, and that it may be used to initiate conversations with fellow State Programs, liaisons, students, and Special Olympics.

Best wishes in the upcoming year!

The Unified Champion Schools Evaluation Team
Center for Social Development and Education
University of Massachusetts Boston

RESPONSE RATE

Liaisons were invited to complete the Year 10 Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey. Nationally, the survey had a 58% response rate, while in New Jersey, the survey had a 69% response rate (see Table 1; see Appendix B for a summary of New Jersey Liaison Survey completion rates in Year 10).

Table 1. *Liaison Survey* Response Rate

<i>Responses received</i>	NJ	National
Number of surveys sent	120	4,830
Number of surveys returned	83	2,822
Response rate	69%	58%

This response rate is moderate, suggesting that the information collected from liaisons in New Jersey likely only somewhat represents the thoughts and opinions of liaisons in New Jersey. Thus, it will be useful to look at the national programming information as well as your State Program's data when deciding what future directions your State Program will take. In order to improve your Program's response rate and ensure high quality data from the schools in your State Program in the future, consider providing incentives for survey completion or adding survey completion as part of your Program's written agreement with liaisons.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

The Unified Champion Schools program was implemented at a range of schools across different school levels, student enrollments, and locations (see Table 2). New Jersey had a higher number of suburban schools than the national average and a slightly higher number of racially diverse schools.

Table 2. Demographics of schools in Year 10¹

Variable	NJ	National
Locale		
Urban	29%	24%
Suburban	64%	44%
Rural	7%	32%
Title I	45%	47%
School Level		
Preschool/Elementary	29%	24%
Middle	17%	17%
High	54%	53%
Student Enrollment		
<500	23%	23%
501-1,000	29%	38%
1,001-1,500	25%	18%
1,501-2,000	11%	11%
More than 2,000	12%	10%
Students with ID		
1-10	11%	19%
11-20	16%	25%
21-30	24%	20%
31-50	19%	17%
51-100	14%	11%
More than 100	16%	8%
Students receiving free/reduced lunch		
0%-25%	31%	18%
26%-50%	13%	22%
51%-75%	6%	17%
76%-100%	19%	21%
Students of racial/ethnic minority		
0%-25%	29%	38%
26%-50%	10%	17%
51%-75%	7%	13%
76%-100%	27%	12%

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The Unified Champion Schools program consists of three main components: Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement (see Appendix A for descriptions of each component). Nationally, Inclusive

¹ Note: percentages in table may not add to 100% due to “other” and “don’t know” responses.

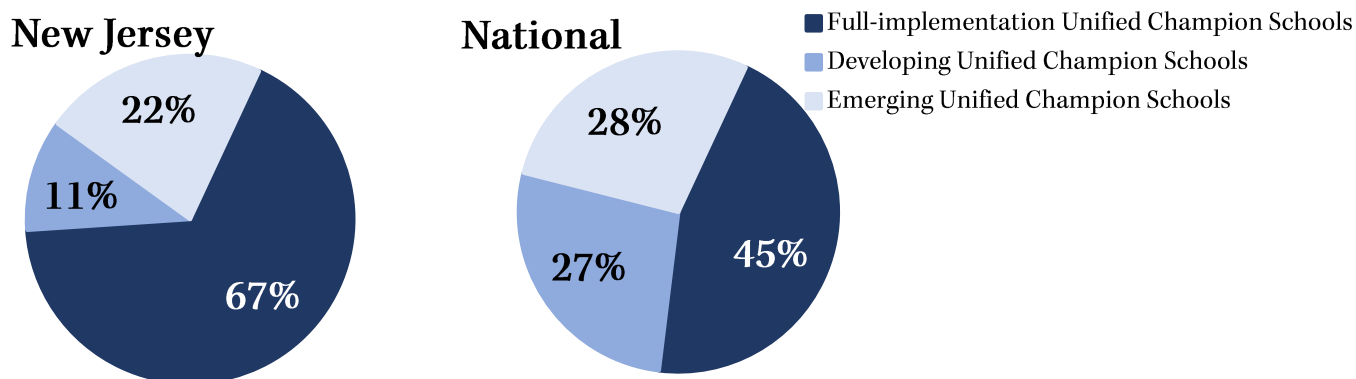
Sports was the most commonly implemented component, implemented by 81% of schools (see Table 3). On the other hand, 95% of schools in New Jersey implemented the Inclusive Youth Leadership component. In terms of individual program activities, a Unified Sports program was the most commonly implemented activity nationally, offered in 81% of schools. Unified Club was the most commonly implemented activity in New Jersey, offered by 91% of schools.

Table 3. Percentage of schools implementing each UCS program component and activity

<i>Component</i>	NJ	National
Inclusive Sports	82%	81%
Whole School Engagement	82%	80%
Inclusive Youth Leadership	95%	76%
<i>Activity</i>		
Unified Sports program	82%	81%
Spread the Word to End the Word	69%	62%
Unified Club	91%	57%
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	44%	43%
Fundraising events	47%	42%
Unified Sports Day/Festival	43%	23%
Young Athletes Volunteers	19%	20%
Special Olympics Youth Summit/Youth Activation Committee	40%	19%
<i>Get Into It</i> Educational Resources	13%	13%
“It’s Our School, Too” play	3%	1%

Based on criteria set by Special Olympics (see Appendix A) and liaisons’ reports of activities at their schools, schools were classified as either full-implementation Unified Champion Schools (implemented activities from all three components), Developing Unified Champion Schools (implemented activities from two components, including Inclusive Sports), or Emerging Unified Champion Schools (implemented activities from one component, or two components but not Inclusive Sports). Nearly half of all schools nationally (45%) were classified as full-implementation Unified Champion Schools in Year 9, while two-thirds of New Jersey schools (67%) were classified as full-implementation Unified Champion Schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of schools meeting each implementation level

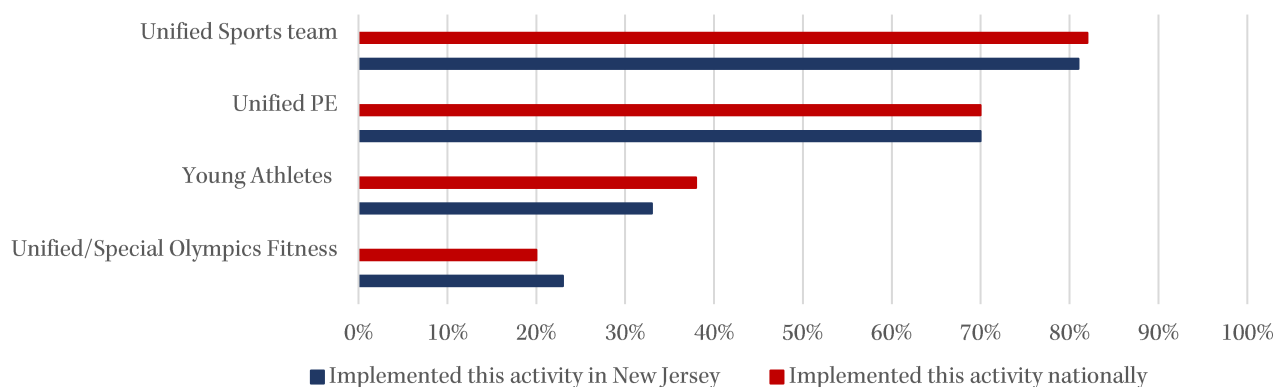


Unified Sports and Unified Club were the most intensive UCS activities available to students. Liaisons who knew the most about both activities (i.e., those who coached a Unified Sports team and advised a Unified Club) were asked how many Unified Sports team participants were also involved in the Unified Club. Half of liaisons nationally (52%) and half in New Jersey (58%) noted that over three-quarters (i.e., 76%-100%) of students on a Unified Sports team also participated in a Unified Club. Clearly, the two activities are strongly connected in many schools.

INCLUSIVE SPORTS

Inclusive Sports is a key aspect of Unified Champion Schools programming. Encouragingly, 81% of schools nationally and 82% in New Jersey implemented Inclusive Sports in Year 10. Within this broader designation, schools could choose from a range of activities including Unified Sports teams, Unified PE, Young Athletes, and Unified/Special Olympics Fitness. Figure 2 demonstrates the activities schools chose to implement within Inclusive Sports.

Figure 2. Percentage of schools implementing each Unified Sports activity^{2,3}



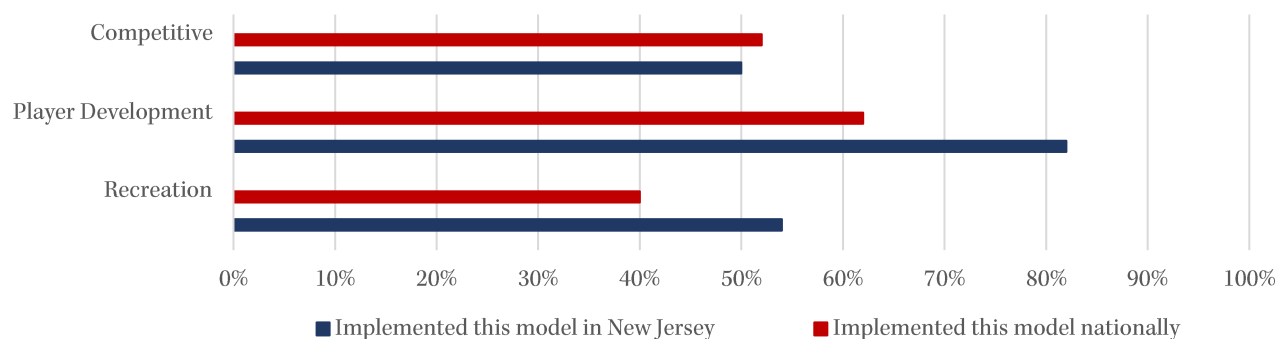
Unified Sports Teams

Within Inclusive Sports, Unified Sports teams were a very popular activity nationally (82%) and in New Jersey (81%). Schools could implement one of three Unified Sports team models, allowing schools to select the model best suited to their school based on school-level factors such as student interest, the type of sport, and participants' skills and abilities. Nationally, schools most often utilized the Player Development model (62%), and in New Jersey, schools most often utilized the Player Development model (82%; see Figure 3).

² These percentages are taken from the subset of schools which implemented any Unified Sports program.

³ Because Young Athletes is a program for children aged 2-7 years old, this question was only asked of schools with pre-K through 2nd grade. Therefore, this percentage is out of elementary schools.

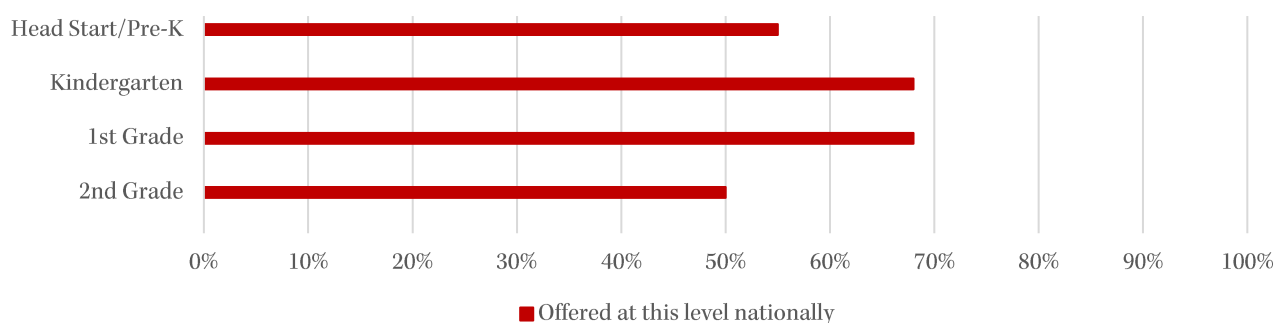
Figure 3. Implementation of Unified Sports models



Young Athletes

In order to more fully understand implementation of Inclusive Sports in elementary schools, the Year 10 evaluation explored implementation of Young Athletes. Among schools which enrolled students in 2nd grade and under, 38% nationally and 33% in New Jersey implemented Young Athletes. While Young Athletes as a whole is available from Head Start/Pre-K through 2nd grade, some schools implemented the program only at certain levels (see Figure 4). One-fifth of schools nationally (20%) implemented the program for all four grades.

Figure 4. Implementation of Young Athletes program, by grade level⁴



Young Athletes activities were most often held at the school (88% nationally). Most Young Athletes programs had older students who volunteered to support activities (75% nationally).

Although the number of schools with both Unified Sports teams and a Young Athletes program was small, at these schools, the activities were often connected. One-third of liaisons nationally (35%) indicated that when students aged out of Young Athletes, they were given the opportunity to join a Unified Sports teams at the school. Beyond participation, one-fifth of liaisons nationally (20%) noted that there was continuity of skill development between the programs (e.g., Young Athletes practiced skills that would be useful for Unified Sports teams at the school). Nationally, Unified Sports teams and Young Athletes sometimes interacted within schools (28%), whether through attending one another's events or through a mentorship model where older students on Unified Sports teams mentored Young Athletes participants.

⁴ New Jersey had only two liaisons who implemented Young Athletes. Because of this, national data about Young Athletes will be more beneficial for Special Olympics New Jersey, so the information in this report about Young Athletes will include only national data.

In elementary schools that did not have a Unified Sports team in Year 10, most schools nationally (63%) indicated that there was some program in place to continue teaching sports skill development to students after they aged out of the Young Athletes program. Such schools indicated that there was other Special Olympics programming that older students could engage in (40%), or that their PE classes provided continued sports skills development (33%).

UNIFIED CLUB

Unified Clubs provided students with the opportunity to plan and implement various events in the school. Students were most frequently involved in planning and implementing Spread the Word to End the Word, with 72% of Unified Clubs nationally and 66% in New Jersey implementing that activity (see Table 4).

Table 4. Activities planned/implemented by Unified Clubs in Year 10

Activity	All Schools	
	NJ	National
Spread the Word to End the Word	66%	72%
Social events (such as dances/socials, group outings, banquets, parties)	52%	61%
Fundraising events	45%	49%
Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally	41%	41%
Community service	29%	36%
Leadership activities (such as a Youth Summit or Youth Activation Committee)	40%	29%
Mentoring/tutoring program	14%	29%
Unified Sports Day	40%	25%
Performances (such as a play or musical performance)	17%	11%

SUMMARY

- Encouragingly, New Jersey has a higher percentage of full-implementation Unified Champion Schools than the national average. This indicates that Unified Champion Schools programming is strong in New Jersey.
- Nationally, Young Athletes programming was often intentionally connected to other Unified Sports programming. Connecting programs across different age groups is a great way to provide continuity of programming for students and encourage participation in Special Olympics over multiple years.

RECRUITMENT INTO UNIFIED SPORTS AND UNIFIED CLUB

Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors were asked to specify how students were recruited into those activities. For Unified Sports, actively targeting specific students or groups of students was the most common recruitment method nationally (73%), while in New Jersey, holding informational or interest meetings was the most common (90%). For Unified Club, making announcements over the school PA system or in classrooms was the most common recruitment tactic nationally (67%), while in New Jersey, holding informational or interest meetings was the most common (77%). See Table 5 for the recruitment tactics used by Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors. Through more general outreach techniques such as making announcements and using flyers, it is possible for schools to reach a broader audience, such as the wide variety of students that are involved in school clubs in general, and through targeting students and holding interest meetings, it is possible to more effectively reach students with a specific interest in that activity, such as for a sports team.

Table 5. Recruitment tactics used for Unified Sports and Unified Club

Recruitment tactic	Unified Sports		Unified Club	
	NJ	Nationally	NJ	Nationally
Actively target specific students or groups of students	70%	73%	77%	58%
Make announcements over the school PA system or in classrooms	77%	56%	65%	67%
Hold information/interest meetings	90%	56%	73%	64%
Hang flyers around the school	57%	38%	48%	50%
Make announcements via school media outlets (e.g., school newspaper, social media, school website)	47%	37%	37%	43%

As seen in Table 5, one common recruitment tactic was to target specific students or groups of students. To further understand how students are recruited into Unified Sports and Unified Club, liaisons were asked which students and groups of students were targeted for recruitment. Table 6 shows which students and groups of students were targeted for recruitment. As might be expected, out of the liaisons who targeted students for recruitment, Unified Sports coaches often recruited students already involved in JV/Varsity sports (55% nationally, 48% New Jersey), and Unified Club advisors often recruited students already involved in other school clubs (56% nationally, 69% New Jersey). Notably, students who were not involved in any other school clubs or groups were often recruited into Unified Sports (52% nationally, 71% New Jersey) and Unified Club (59% nationally, 73% New Jersey).

Table 6. Students targeted for recruitment in Unified Sports and Unified Club

Groups targeted for recruitment in schools which targeted specific groups	Unified Sports		Unified Club	
	NJ	Nationally	NJ	Nationally
Students involved in other school clubs or groups (e.g., leadership clubs, service clubs, career clubs, special interest clubs)	71%	58%	69%	56%
JV or Varsity athletes	48%	55%	44%	49%
Students who aren't involved in any other school clubs or groups	71%	52%	73%	59%
Student Council/Government members	67%	43%	60%	49%
National Honor/Junior Honor Society members	57%	37%	35%	41%
Students who tried out for JV/Varsity teams but were not selected	52%	35%	33%	25%
Students who play intramural sports	62%	33%	42%	26%

SUMMARY

- Nationally and in New Jersey, the Unified Champion Schools program sometimes recruits students who are not involved in any other clubs or groups. Recent evaluations have revealed that the UCS program may have many benefits for students who do not participate in school activities (i.e., disengaged students), such as promoting grit/perseverance, school social support, and a sense of belongingness. Encouraging schools to actively recruit disengaged students will allow the UCS program to engage a broader range of students.

APPLICATIONS FOR UNIFIED SPORTS AND UNIFIED CLUB

The Year 10 evaluation began to explore whether there were application processes in place for Unified Sports teams and Unified Clubs, which students were required to complete an application, and what was required to apply. Nationally, 37% of liaisons indicated that there was an application process to join Unified Club, while 34% indicated there was an application process to join Unified Sport. In New Jersey, 21% of liaisons indicated there was an application for Unified Club and 41% indicated there was an application for Unified Sports.

For the Club, this application was typically required for both students with and without disabilities (52% nationally, 69% New Jersey) or just students without disabilities (47% nationally, 31% New Jersey). Similarly, Unified Sports applications were generally required for both students with and without disabilities (68% nationally, 83% New Jersey) or just students without disabilities (30% nationally, 17% New Jersey). The application process consisted of different requirements from school to school (see Table 7).

Table 7. Application requirements for Unified Club and Unified Sports

Application requirement	Unified Sports		Unified Club	
	NJ	Nationally	NJ	Nationally
Parental permission form	83%	81%	77%	72%
Physical exam/medical records	58%	55%	--	-- ⁵
Grades/transcript	17%	27%	85%	26%
An in-person interview	8%	25%	77%	28%
Letters of recommendation from teachers	--	24%	92%	39%
A personal statement/essay	25%	23%	46%	50%

SUMMARY

- In New Jersey, fewer schools than the national average required students to complete applications for Unified Club.

SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

Unified Champion Schools receive support from a range of sources. Previous evaluations have examined forms of support including school-based support (such as the Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team, school clubs, and other school/student groups) and community-based support (such as other schools and community-based Special Olympics programs). The Year 10 evaluation continued to examine the supports available to liaisons, focusing on school district-level support, the support provided by the UCS Leadership Team, and SO support at the community, State Program, and national level. The Year 10 evaluation also provided insight into the type of training and support liaisons have and would like to receive from their State Program.

SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPPORT

Liaisons almost universally indicated that their school district supported the UCS program at their school (90% nationally, 94% New Jersey). Many liaisons indicated that the district supported the program at other schools in their

⁵ This question was only asked for Unified Sports programs.

district as well (63% nationally, 65% New Jersey). Liaisons believed that this network of support was important, with a majority of liaisons nationally (83%) and in New Jersey (96%) reporting they relied on support from their school district in order to successfully implement the UCS program in Year 10. One-quarter of schools nationally (24%) and one-quarter in New Jersey (27%) reported that they relied on this support “a lot.” District support was clearly of value to the UCS program; in fact, more schools nationally with district support for the UCS program met full-implementation Unified Champion School status than schools without district support (59% and 39%, respectively).⁶ Nationally, district support came in many forms, including financial support (29%), event permissions (24%) or helping with planning/implementation (14%), and by encouraging other schools in the district to implement the UCS program (14%). In New Jersey, the most common form of district support was financial support (26%).

LEADERSHIP TEAM

In Year 10, 41% of liaisons nationally and 58% in New Jersey reported that their school had a Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team. Over half of schools with Leadership Teams nationally (61%) and almost three-quarters in New Jersey (71%) have utilized them for more than one year, indicating that many schools utilized the team structure over multiple years.

Liaisons sometimes reported that their State Program had suggested they form a Leadership Team (32% nationally, 43% New Jersey). When their State Program suggested forming a Leadership Team, a majority of liaisons nationally (67%) and in New Jersey (78%) did, in fact, implement a Leadership Team. In contrast, liaisons who reported their State Program had not suggested forming a Leadership Team used this support structure less often (34% nationally, 56% New Jersey).

The Year 10 evaluation began to explore reasons liaisons did not form a Leadership Team. One common reason listed by liaisons included that the school was new to the UCS program and did not yet have the capacity to form a Leadership Team (23% nationally, 24% New Jersey). Another reason was that while the school did not have a formal Leadership Team, it did have some other structure providing support for the UCS program (21% nationally, 14% New Jersey). These alternative leadership structures included structures similar to the UCS Leadership Team but were not formally called a “Leadership Team,” strong student leadership within the school, or two staff members leading the program rather than a larger team. Lastly, another common reason schools did not form a Leadership Team in Year 10 was that liaisons were unaware of the option (15% nationally, 19% New Jersey).

When schools did implement Leadership Teams, they served a range of purposes. Leadership Teams created strategies to engage the broader school community (37% nationally, 48% New Jersey), developed school improvement plans (27% nationally, 35% New Jersey), which were often part of broader school improvement plans (66% nationally, 88% New Jersey), and conducted an assessment of social inclusion at the school (14% nationally, 29% New Jersey).

SUPPORT FROM SPECIAL OLYMPICS

In addition to support from the school, liaisons reported that they received a large amount of support from SO. This support came from several levels, including community-based SO program collaboration, national SO implementation resources, and State Program trainings.

⁶ A Pearson chi square test of independence was used to determine the significance of these findings: $\chi^2(2, N = 2743) = 55.50, p < .001$.

Community-Based Special Olympics Support

One source of collaboration and support for liaisons is having a local community-based Special Olympics program near their school. In Year 10, half of liaisons nationally (53%) and one-third in New Jersey (31%) reported that there was a community-based SO program in their town/city. These schools often collaborated with the community-based SO programs. About three-quarters of the schools nationally (72%) and two-thirds in New Jersey (65%) had students who competed at community-based SO sports events. Typically, liaisons noted that only students with intellectual disabilities (49% nationally, 41% New Jersey) or both students with and without intellectual disabilities (43% nationally, 41% New Jersey) from their school competed in these events. Some schools also had students that volunteered at those events (46% nationally, 46% New Jersey). Student volunteers were typically both students with and without intellectual disabilities (57% nationally, 83% New Jersey) or only students without intellectual disabilities (36% nationally, 8% New Jersey).

Community-based SO programs continued to reach out to students as they neared graduation. Nearly half of the schools nationally (43%) over half in New Jersey (56%) reported their community-based SO program had provided the school with information for graduating students about staying involved with Special Olympics. This information was typically provided for both students with and without intellectual disabilities (56% nationally, 50% New Jersey), though sometimes it was provided for only students with intellectual disabilities (35% nationally, 50% New Jersey), which may reflect the type of programming available from these community-based SO programs. Through collaboration with community-based SO programs, the UCS program can act as a springboard to continued SO involvement after high school.

Special Olympics Resources

At the national level, Special Olympics has developed several resources to help schools implement the UCS program, including implementation playbooks for each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high), the *Unified Physical Education Resources*, and the *Young Athletes Activity Guide*. Half of all liaisons nationally (51%) and over half / in New Jersey (60%) indicated that they used SO resources (print or online) to implement the UCS program in Year 10. Of high school liaisons who reported using SO resources, 42% of liaisons nationally and 80% in New Jersey used the *Unified Champion Schools High School Playbook*. Most of the high schools that did not use the *High School Playbook* in Year 10 were not aware of this resource (90% nationally, 100% New Jersey). A similar trend emerged with schools implementing Unified PE, where the majority of liaisons who did not use the *Unified Physical Education Resources* (64% nationally, 29% New Jersey) reported that they did not know SO had released this resource (88% nationally, 71% New Jersey). In contrast, the majority of elementary schools implementing Young Athletes used the *Young Athletes Activity Guide*, with only one-quarter reporting they did not use the guide (26% nationally, 50% New Jersey).

The *Unified Champion Schools Middle Level Playbook* was the newest resource released by SO prior to data collection for the Year 10 evaluation. Unsurprisingly, not many middle schools were aware of this resource. Of all the middle school liaisons who reported using SO resources, only 15% nationally and 39% in New Jersey were aware of the *Middle Level Playbook*, though, encouragingly, when liaisons were aware it existed, many used it (44% nationally, 100% New Jersey).

Special Olympics State Program Trainings

Special Olympics State Programs often offer liaisons training related to the UCS program. Half of liaisons nationally (53%) and two-thirds New Jersey (65%) indicated that they were aware of UCS-related trainings offered by their State Program. See Table 8 for more information on trainings liaisons reported that their State Program offered.

Liaisons were also asked what trainings they would like to receive in the future. Nationally, liaisons most commonly asked for training on how to implement the UCS program or specific activities (24%), with a smaller number of liaisons requesting trainings on a range of other training topics such as how to get people involved in the program (8%) and logistics trainings (8%). In New Jersey, liaisons most commonly requested training on how to implement the UCS program or specific activities (29%).

Table 8. Trainings offered by Special Olympics State Programs

<i>Type of training offered</i>	NJ	National
Unified Sports coaching	71%	70%
General information about Special Olympics	50%	66%
Whole School Engagement activities	48%	54%
Inclusive Youth Leadership	42%	35%
How to create a socially inclusive school	40%	30%
Unified PE	50%	28%
Young Athletes	27%	27%
UCS Leadership Team	35%	25%

SUMMARY

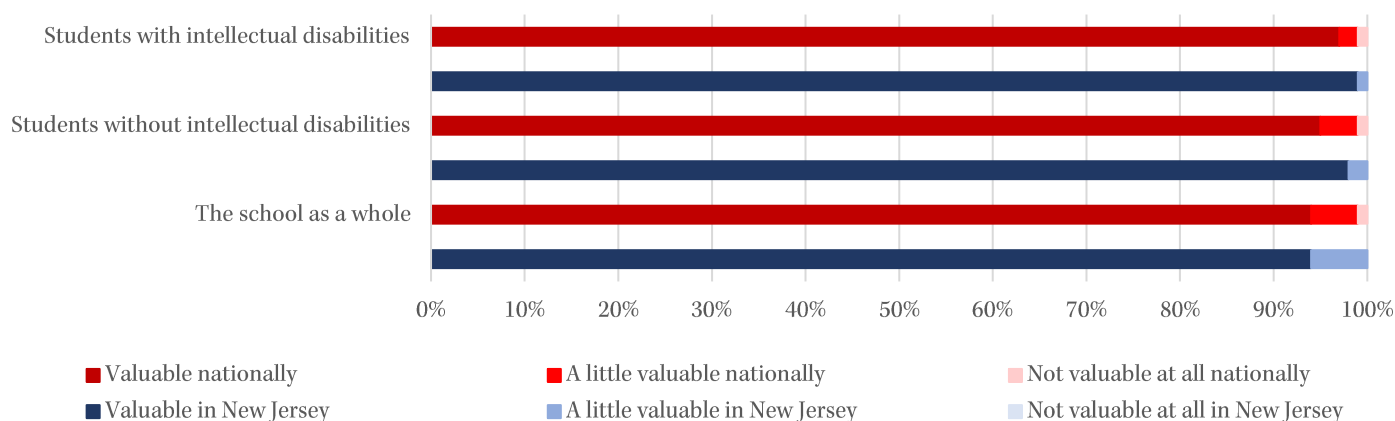
- The trainings requested by liaisons demonstrate that many liaisons are interested in training on the day-to-day aspects of implementing a UCS program, which is aligned with many of the trainings being offered by State Programs.
- Liaisons reported that New Jersey offers trainings with general information about Special Olympics less often than the national average. In the future, offering trainings on this topic or increasing advertisement of those trainings may be beneficial.
- Clearly, State Programs have an influence on whether liaisons choose to form Leadership Teams, emphasizing the importance of State Programs educating liaisons about the benefits of forming a Leadership Team.

IMPACT

IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL

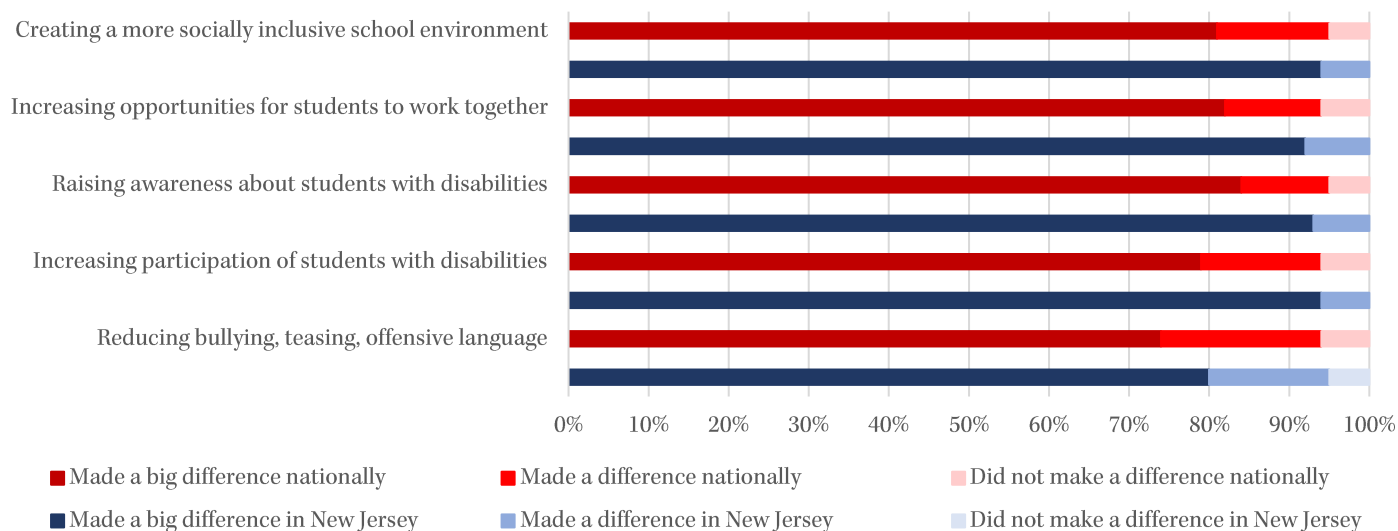
In order to further explore the impact of the Unified Champion Schools program, the Year 9 evaluation asked liaisons about their perceptions of the impact of the three components on the school. Figure 5 demonstrates how valuable liaisons felt the program was to students with disabilities in their school, students without disabilities in their school, and the school as a whole.

Figure 5. Percentage of liaisons who indicated each component was “very valuable” to school members



Liaisons identified specific areas in which the Unified Champion Schools program impacted their school environment. Specifically, liaisons nationally indicated that they felt the program made a difference in raising awareness about students with disabilities (95%), creating a more socially inclusive school environment (95%), and increasing opportunities for students to work together (94%; see Figure 6). In New Jersey, liaisons most often indicated that the program made a difference in increasing participation of students with disabilities (100%), creating a more socially inclusive environment (100%), and raising awareness about students with disabilities (100%).

Figure 6. Value to and impact on the school, as reported by school liaisons⁷



IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Beyond the program's benefits for inclusion, the evaluation explored how the Unified Champion Schools program impacted students' development. An emerging area of interest in the youth development field is social and emotional learning (SEL), defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to

⁷ Liaisons were asked to rate, on a six point scale, whether the Unified Champion Schools program made a difference in several dimensions. The category “did not make a difference” encompasses the first two points on the scale (0, 1); “made a difference” encompasses the middle two points on the scale (2, 3); “made a big difference” includes the final two points on the scale (4, 5).

understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions”.⁸

CASEL identifies five SE competencies.⁹

- Self-awareness: the ability to recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.
- Self-management: the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively.
- Social awareness: the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from different backgrounds
- Relationship skills: the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals
- Responsible decision-making: the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions

Several methods of teaching social and emotional competencies align well with approaches in the Unified Champion Schools program; for example, using team sports to foster cooperation and teamwork or the chance to practice group decision-making.

Figure 7. CASEL SEL Framework



The Year 10 evaluation looked specifically at Unified Sports and Unified Club, as these activities provide students with ongoing interactions, rather than one-time events, and foster environments where SE competencies could be improved. This is confirmed by the feedback of coaches and club advisors, who overwhelmingly believed that Unified Sports and Unified Club provided students with the opportunity for social and emotional development within all five of CASEL’s SEL competencies, especially relationships skills and social awareness. Table 9 demonstrates the percentage of coaches/club advisors who believed students had the opportunity to practice SE skills in Unified Sports and Unified Club.

⁸ www.casel.org

⁹ <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>

Table 9. Opportunities for SEL in Unified Sports and Unified Club

UCS Activity SE Competency	Percentage of Coaches/Advisors	
	NJ	National
Unified Sports	n = 30	n = 1127
Self-awareness	100%	89%
Self-management	97%	91%
Responsible decision-making	100%	91%
Relationship skills	97%	92%
Social awareness	100%	92%
Unified Club	n = 62	n = 1110
Self-awareness	90%	85%
Self-management	87%	87%
Responsible decision-making	94%	90%
Relationship skills	95%	94%
Social awareness	98%	94%

SUMMARY

- Findings in the Year 10 evaluation suggest that the UCS program goes beyond promoting a socially inclusive school environment and provides a pathway for students to improve their SEL skills.

REFLECTIONS

While these data certainly represent the positive impact of the Unified Champion Schools program, perhaps the most insightful indication of success comes from the liaisons themselves. Below is a short compilation of reflections about the Unified Champion Schools program in Year 10 from New Jersey liaisons.¹⁰

The Unified Program has a very positive influence on the district as a whole. Our conversations are different and Unified is leading our discussion for more inclusion in all environments.

It has positively impacted the school and has helped us to build a culture of inclusion.

Unified Champion has created a school climate that is caring, respectful, and helpful.

We've been blessed to be a part of this program for the past two years. You could see the difference in student and parental support... They absolutely LOVE being involved in these activities.

Implementation of the program this year was a great start for our school. The club will allow for more progression towards interscholastic competition. This club is also starting to bring awareness to students without intellectual disabilities in a way that students recognize that a disability does not define a person and all should be offered a chance.

¹⁰ These reflections have been edited for clarity, spelling, grammar, and length.

We hope that this report will be useful to your State Program as you continue to plan and implement the Unified Champion Schools program in the coming years. If you have any questions, comments, or requests for additional data, please contact the Unified Champion Schools Evaluation Team at the Center for Social Development and Education.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS AND CRITERIA

SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a school-based program that offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sport, classroom, and school climates of acceptance. The Unified Champion Schools program is the comprehensive model of the Unified Schools strategy that is implemented in the United States, consisting of activities within three components: inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement.

UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS COMPONENTS

Inclusive Sports

Opportunities which combine individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition and/or skill development.

Examples: Unified Sports, Unified PE, and Special Olympics Young Athletes

Inclusive Youth Leadership

Opportunities for youth with and without intellectual disabilities to become agents of change by providing direction and helping lead the implementation of the Unified Champion Schools program in their school, community, or state. The partnership developed between partner and athlete allows both young people to play an equal role in the leadership process.

Examples: Unified Clubs, Youth Activation Committees, Inclusive Youth Leadership Training, Youth Summits

Whole School Engagement

An activity, event, rally etc. that offers the entire student body the opportunity to participate in and/or be a part of the Unified Champion Schools program, including the utilization of education and community resources.

Examples: *Get into It*® Educational Resources, Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally, Unified Sports Day, Spread the Word to End the Word, Polar Plunge/fundraising.

SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION LEVELS

Full-implementation Unified Champion School

Full-implementation Unified Champion Schools conduct a combination of the three program components (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement). Through various levels of intensity, the combination of these three components creates the maximum impact within a school.

Developing Unified Champion School

Developing Unified Champion Schools conduct two out of three of the program components (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement). Inclusive Sports must be one of the two components conducted. These schools are expected to move to full-implementation Unified Champion School status within 3 years.

Emerging Unified Champion School

An Emerging Unified Champion School conducts either one program component (e.g., only Inclusive Sports, only Inclusive Youth Leadership, or only Whole School Engagement), or conducts two program components but not Inclusive Sports (Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement).

UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Leadership Team is ideally comprised of community members including teachers, administrators, students with and without disabilities, parents, and other school staff. Leadership Teams come together to promote the Unified Champion Schools program and implement activities in the school and community.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY COMPLETION RATES FOR YEAR 10

The following table contains a comprehensive list of the schools in your State Program that completed the Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey for Year 10. The names of the schools that were sent the survey are listed in the first column and are followed by the name of the liaison who received the survey for each school.¹¹ An “X” in the Year 10 column indicates the school completed the survey.

School Name	Liaison Name	Year 10 (66% Response Rate)
Alan B. Shepard Elementary	Kim Boland	X
Arthur L. Johnson High School	Doreen Babis	X
Benjamin Franklin Elementary	Heather Bond	
Berkeley Terrace Elementary	Mitchell Perry	X
Berkeley Township Elementary	Joseph Zacccone	X
Bordentown High School	Larry Larned	
Brimm Medical Arts High School	Lisa Ramos	X
Burlington City High School	Michael Scapellato	
Burlington Township High School	Clare White	X
Burnet Middle School	Diana Pielech	X
Carl Sandburg Middle School	Daniel Antaniazzi	
Cedar Creek High School	Shawn Sullivan	X
Cedar Drive Middle School	Russ Witt	
Central Elementary	Kimberly Neary	X
Chancellor Elementary	Christine Pfeiffer	X
Chatham High School	Christine Cavallo	X
Cinnaminson High School	Daniel Rella	X
Clara B. Worth Elementary	Cara Burton	X
Clayton High School	Tracy Moore	X
Clifton High School	Heather Kutler	X
Clifton Public School 16	Michael Horton	
Clinton Public School	Jessica Kolodziej	X
Colts Neck High School	Jennifer Hill	
Cooper's Poynt Family School	Erin Garrity	
Cranford High School	Darren Torsone	
David E. Owens Middle School	Paula Daloisio	
Delaware Valley Regional High School	Tiffany Kuhl	X
East Brook Middle School	Jeanne Browne	X
East Hanover Middle School	Gillian George	
Edison High School	Donaven Kregeloh	X
Emma L. Arleth Elementary	Rachel Gelfand	X
Ewing High School	Jamie Krukowski	X
Florence Elementary	Jordan Epstein	X
Fountain Woods Elementary	Leigh Yago	X

¹¹ Please note that school and liaison names are presented exactly as received from the list your State Program reported to SOI in Year 10. If this list contains spelling errors or mistakes, please update the school and liaison contact information you share with SOI.

School Name	Liaison Name	Year 10 (66% Response Rate)
Frank J. Smith Elementary	Alexis Piombino	X
Franklin High School	Holly Gamble	X
Freehold High School	Jason Longo	
Freehold Township High School	Alexandra Cavallo	
Grant Elementary	Susanne Stahlbrand	
Grove Street Elementary	Salim Laib	X
H&M Potter Elementary	Jason Miller	X
Hamilton High School West	Danielle Rubel	X
Herbert Hoover Middle School	Erin Murtagh	X
Hillsborough High School	Suzan Radwan	X
Holmdel High School	James Gelpke	X
Hopewell Valley Regional High School	Chris Fossel	X
Howell High School	Christine Baier-Kenduck	
Irvington High School	Kristen Duska	X
James Madison Elementary	Barbara Bell	X
James Monroe Elementary	Michael Fernandez	
Jefferson Elementary	Samantha Formica	X
Jefferson School Elementary	Christopher Tunnel	
Jefferson Township High School	Nicole Wildermuth	X
John Adams Middle School	Brenda Chesseri	X
John P. Stevens High School	Marissa Freeman	X
Kawameeh Middle School	Lindsey Tennen	X
Kingsway Regional High School	Shanna M. Hoffman	X
Lanoka Harbor Elementary	Jodi Hughes	X
Lincoln Middle School	Jennifer DeRusso	
Madison Avenue School	Shannon Ostoyic	X
Madison Junior School	Kathy Siso	
Mainland Regional High School	Tom Jamison	
Manalapan High School	Rodney Taylor	
Marlboro High School	Lindsay Donohue	
Matawan Regional High School	Chris Harnett	
Memorial Elementary	Philip Sgroi	
Menlo Park Elementary	James McCarthy	
Middletown High School South	Robert Dunn	
Millburn High School	Roger Askins	X
Millville High School	David LaGamba	
Monroe Township High School	Kathleen Dillon	
Montgomery High School	Marybeth Torralba	X
Moorestown High School	Dave Tate	X
Morris Knolls High School	Kenneth Mullen	
Morristown High School	Barbara Miller	X
Mount Vernon Avenue Elementary	Jessica Chila	X
Mt. Olive High School	Nancy Gilbert	X
Mt. Olive Middle School	Michelle Corazza	
Mullica Township Middle School	Tracey Domena	

School Name	Liaison Name	Year 10 (66% Response Rate)
New Brunswick High School	Miguel Ulloa	X
North Hunterdon High School	Michelle McGann	X
Old Bridge High School	Karen Lewicki	X
Overbrook High School	Misty Procopio	X
Phillipsburg High School	Jason Kish	X
Phillipsburg Middle School	Maria Vera	
PJ Hill Elementary	Talaya Wilson	
Pond Road Middle School	Lauren Archer	X
Randolph High School	Brianne McBreen	X
Raritan High School	Nancy Beaty	X
Red Bank Regional High School	Denise Jadevaia	
Ridge High School	Tara Cantagallo	X
Rivera Middle School	Anthony Carsella	X
Robbinsville High School	Christie Delhagen	X
Roosevelt Middle School	Felecia Lott	
Salem High School	Jeffrey James	
Salem Middle School	Jamie Bacon	X
Samsel Upper Elementary	Dana Giorgianni	X
Sayreville Middle School	Melissa Ciampa	X
Sayreville War Memorial High School	Marcus Ivy	X
Sharon Elementary	Margaret Walsh	X
Somerville High School	Karen Stephenson	X
South Brunswick High School	Kathleen Derillo	
South Harrison Township Elementary	Shanna Hoffman	
Steinert High School - East	Cheryl Hutchinson	X
Thomas Jefferson Middle School	Charles Catania	X
Thurgood Marshall Elementary	Jerry Austin	X
Trenton Central High School West Campus	Sharron Grady	X
Union Avenue Middle School	Michael Bussaco	
Union City High School	Marcus Lozano	X
Union High School	Adriane Damiano	X
University Elementary	Donald Mattola	
University Middle School	Stephen Bernath	X
Vineland High School	Sabrina Hirleman	X
Voorhees High School	Kaitlyn Escott	X
Warren Hills High School	Geri McKelvey	
Washington Elementary (Edison)	Kristen Glus	X
Washington Park School	Brett Scully	X
Washington Township High School	Jan Brodzinski	X
West Brook Middle School	Juan Castro	X
West Morris Mendham High School	Matt Milner	X
West Windsor Plainsboro High School North	Ken Mason	X
William Annin Middle School	Rebecca Bollaro	X
Woodbrook Elementary	Eugene Molloy	
Woodrow Wilson Middle School (Clifton)	Carla Rodriguez	X

School Name	Liaison Name	Year 10 (66% Response Rate)
Woodrow Wilson Middle School (Edison)	Thomas Macchiaverna	
Woodrow Wilson School	Laurie Lasovik	X